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THE  
LIFE  
AND  
DREADFUL TRANSACTIONS  
OF  
GEORGE BRUCE,

And his Crew of  
ROBBERS AND MURDERERS,

Who were all taken in a Cave, near the Sea Side,  
in Devonshire, where they haunted for 25  
years, without being found out, there  
being so many different inlets to  
the Cave, and where they  
robbed and murdered  
about 800 people.

Also an account of the manner in which they were  
taken, condemned and executed, and their  
hardened behaviour at the place of  
execution.

Printed in the Present Year.

THE DREIFUL



## **HISTORY OF GEORGE BRUCE.**

The following history is the strongest evidence of horrid barbarity ever known for these four hundred years past. And, were it not well attested by Ministers, Deacons, and Wardens, few could credit there were such creatures on the earth as could be capable of eating human flesh. True it is, that in the Dutch and Portuguese settlements near the Cape of Good Hope, there are Cannibals who eat human bodies, and all sorts of carrion, and wear entrails round their legs and arms, and paint their bodies with the grease of the same; but there are no such monsters known in this part of the world. There is a large rock in Devonshire, in which there is a deep cave, and those who know its situation affirm that many villains have frequented it time out of memory. But as there were or-

ders given, some time ago, that twelve men, at the charge of the County, should search the cave once a day, and take up all persons whom they found there, vagabonds have now entirely abandoned it.

*The Dreadful Transactions of George Bruce.*

THE following account, though as well attested as any historical fact can be, is almost incredible, for the monstrous and unparalelled barbarities that it relates, there being nothing in novels that we ever heard of with the same degree of certainty, that may be compared with it, or that shows more plainly how far a brutish temper, untamed by education and a knowledge of the world, may carry a man, or what horrible colours it is capable of shewing him in.

George Bruce was born in Devonshire, about eight or nine miles eastward of the city of Exeter; his parents worked at hedging and ditching, and brought up their son to the same occupation. He got his bread in his youth by these means, but being very much addicted to idleness, and not chusing to be confined to any honest employment, he left his father and mother, and ran away, with a woman as viciously inclined as himself, into the unfrequented parts of Devon-

4  
shire, where they lived upwards of 25 years, without going into any city, town or village.

During the course of this retirement, they associated themselves from time to time with a great number of abandoned profligates, who had been brought up after their own manner; they never kept any other company, and supported themselves by robbing, being moreover so very cruel, that they never robbed any person whom they did not also murder.

By this bloody method, and their living so retired from the world, they continued a long time undiscovered, there being nobody able to guess how the people were lost who went by the place where they lived. As soon as they had robbed and murdered any man, woman, or child, they used to carry off their carcases to their den, where cutting them in pieces, they would pickle the mangled limbs and afterwards eat them, being their principal subsistence.

All the people in the adjacent parts were alarmed at so uncommon a loss of their neighbours; for there was no travelling near the den of these wretches. This occasioned spies to be sent into those parts, and many of them never returned again, while those that did, after the strictest search and enquiry, could



not find out how these melancholy matters happened. There were several honest travellers taken up on suspicion and wrongfully hanged; several innocent innkeepers were executed, for no other reason than that the persons who had been lost were known to have lain at their houses, it being suspected that they had murdered them and buried their bodies in obscure places. This imaginable justice was executed with such severity, in order to prevent these frequent atrocious deeds, that the innkeepers who lived on the roads nigh the den left off their business, for fear of being made examples of, and followed other employments. This occasioned great inconvenience to travellers, who were now in much distress for want of accommodation; and, in short, the inhabitants began entirely to desert that part of the country.

Thus did George and his horrid gang go on in their unheard of crimes, perpetrating the most wicked deeds with impunity.— Sometimes they would attack four, five, or six men together, if they were on foot, but never more than two if on horseback. They were also very careful none should escape, an ambuscade being made on every side, so that they had no chance in fight. This was what protected the gang so long, for not one who fell into their hands escaped to give in-

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formation. The place they haunted was remarkably solitary, the den reaching a mile under ground, so that when some armed men, who had been sent to search, came to the place, they passed by the mouth of the cave without taking any notice, not supposing any thing human would live in such a place of horror.

The number of people they destroyed was never rightly known, but it was computed that, in 25 years, they had murdered 800 men, women, and children; but they were at last detected, and the manner of the discovery was as follows:—

A farmer on horseback, and his wife behind him, coming home one evening from a fair, fell into an ambuscade of these villains, and was immediately attacked in a furious manner. The man fought bravely, riding some of them down, and trampling on them with his horse; but in the conflict his wife fell from behind him, and was instantly murdered before his face, the female cannibals cutting her throat and sucking her blood; this done, they ripped her up and pulled out her entrails, which dismal spectacle caused the man to make more resistance. It pleased Providence, while he was engaged, that about thirty people came in a body together from the fair, on which George and his



crew withdrew, and made the best of their way to their den.

This was the first man that fell in their way and came off alive; he told the company what had happened, and shewed them the mangled body of his wife, which the murderers had not time to carry off. They were struck with amazement, and went and made it known to the Mayor of Exeter, who sent an express to the High Sheriff of the county, who assembled together about 400 of the country people, and set out for the place where these tragedies were acted, in order to find out the hellish crew who had so long been a nuisance to that part of the kingdom. The man who had been attacked was the guide. No sign of the habitation was found for a long time, and even when they came to the cave, they did not imagine that it was the place, but were going to pursue their search further on; however, lighted torches were procured, and a great many men entered through the intricate windings, till they came to the private recess of the murderers, the whole of whom they secured, after a most desperate resistance. They also found a quantity of money, watches, rings, swords, pistols, and a large quantity of clothes, which they had taken from those they had murdered.

George's savage gang was thirty in number, and after they were secured, the people buried what human flesh they found; then taking all the spoil, they returned to Exeter with the prisoners, the country people flocking round to see the cursed tribe. When they came to the town they were committed to jail, and next day conducted under a strong guard to Plymouth, and, in three days afterwards, were tried and condemned. Their sentence was awful—twenty men and ten women received sentence of death; the men were strangled, and their bodies dissected; the women, with their daughters, were strangled and burnt, and they died without the least sign of repentance, uttering the most horrid imprecations with their last breath.

Thus ended the greatest scene of wickedness and villainy that ever took place in Britain, or in any civilized country. Cannibals were never known in this kingdom before, but the attestations here annexed are so strong, that they put the present instance beyond a doubt.

This was printed at the desire of William Williams, George Abercromby, and John Gashon, Sheriffs.

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F. I. N. I. S.

